

# **Immigrant Professional Integration: Federal Policy Recommendations**

**IMPRINT**

**January 2012**

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## CONTEXT

Among the nearly 40 million US residents who were born in another country, a significant percentage arrived in the United States having already acquired a college or graduate degree. Yet a remarkable 2.7 million of these talented individuals are currently unemployed or underemployed in low-wage jobs that fail to draw on their high levels of education and prior experience as doctors, engineers and other professionals.

It is to our nation's benefit to ensure that these individuals' labor market trajectory is not unnecessarily blocked. Ensuring that they are able to re-establish themselves as working professionals in the US has significant positive economic impact on individuals, families, and our society at large.

While there are a variety of interventions that can aid this population, **these recommendations focus on those that are within control of the executive branch of the federal government, and may be accomplished within a relatively short timeframe.**

IMPRINT, the nonprofit coalition that developed these recommendations, is well-positioned to support several of the following efforts through consultation, implementation, or other forms of partnership. More information about the accomplishments and qualifications of IMPRINT can be found on the last page of this document.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

With a focus on executive-branch actions, we recommend focusing policy efforts on two core areas that have broad impact: closing the information gap, and improving access to workforce services.

Focusing on these two priority areas will ensure that the interventions can benefit immigrant professionals living in all regions of the US, of every ethnic and racial background, and of all professional fields. These cross-cutting issues fall under the jurisdiction of several cabinet departments and related federal agencies, including but not limited to the Departments of Labor, Education, State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services. More crucially, action within these two priority areas has the potential to engender a wider shift in how skilled immigrant integration is conceived of and implemented.

### A. Closing the Information Gap

One of the top barriers facing immigrant professionals is a lack of information with which to make informed decisions about their career path in the U.S. Such "information starvation" can delay an immigrant's entry into the workforce, deplete resources on fruitless pursuits, and create significant confusion over realistic career prospects. Over time, immigrant jobseekers can become frustrated by their isolation and profoundly discouraged at the difficulties in re-establishing their careers, ultimately retreating from the professional labor market and resigning themselves to permanent underutilization.

Nationwide, there are only a handful of professions for which a clear career pathway for internationally educated workers is clearly laid out. For most professions, immigrants must chart their own individual course through a confusing maze of state and professional association licensure, credential evaluation and transfer, and acculturation to the demands of the US white-collar labor market.

With little or no informed guidance available on career pathways for the foreign-trained, individual workers end up making “best guesses,” sometimes wasting money on exams or training courses which have little prospect of leading to career success, and other times being given bad advice (such as a master’s-degree level electrical engineer being advised to “Get a GED”) by ill-informed or even deceptive sources.

To address this information gap, the federal government can act on a number of fronts:

**A1. Provide career information to prospective and newly arriving immigrants.**

***Desired outcome: Skilled immigrants are more likely to begin career pathways rather than survival jobs***

These materials could be modeled on existing career guides (See Appendix for IMPRINT examples or consider Office of Refugee Resettlement-funded materials such as RefugeeWorks guides) and share both technical information and qualitative information to provide realistic advice for newcomers.

There are a variety of intervention points at which the materials could be delivered, including during US State Department consular interviews; via the National Benefits Center for newly arriving diversity visa lottery winners and other green-card recipients; via the VOLAGs engaged in refugee resettlement work; on the current USCIS website; via [www.WelcometoUSA.gov](http://www.WelcometoUSA.gov); or via an entirely new website specifically tailored to immigrant professionals.

**A2. Create an online site for newcomers to obtain accurate and timely employment guidance.**

***Desired outcome: Skilled workers lose less time and money pursuing wrong paths; skilled workers can align settlement and career pursuits with market need***

The site could be loosely modeled on the Canadian government website [AlbertaCanada.com](http://AlbertaCanada.com), which collects a wide range of workforce and labor market information in one easy portal for newcomers to access. In particular, it could include:

- Information on the US labor market, available positions, and career pathways (e.g. via US DOL’s O\*Net)
- Links to service providers able to address immigrant employment and educational needs
- Specialized content designed for immigrant professionals, including career advice

**A3. Publish promising-practices or issue brief for use by adult education and workforce providers.**

***Desired outcome: Builds expertise and capacity of case workers in existing workforce development systems, ultimately improving quality of service and outcomes for skilled immigrants***

This would address the parallel information gap that exists among educators and workforce service providers themselves -- who often have sharply limited time to gather information about *any* of the special populations they are expected to serve.

Content would address skilled immigrants’ particular workforce needs and the means to address them. While the skilled immigrant integration field is too young for its interventions to have been fully researched (see recommendation 5 below), a core group of promising practices has begun to emerge. The brief could be disseminated through existing federal-state connections in the adult education and

workforce development fields, including state and municipal agencies, local workforce one-stop centers, and community based organizations, as well as through community colleges. For one example, see the link to *Supporting Skilled Immigrants Toolkit* from World Education Services' Global Talent Bridge program in the appendix.

#### **A4. Fund the development of a clearinghouse of credentialing-related information.**

***Desired outcome: Makes a complex system transparent so that skilled workers have higher success licensing in regulated professions***

Such a clearinghouse would serve as a central repository for existing information on state- and profession-specific credentialing processes, as well as a source of expertise to government, nonprofit, and other actors seeking to develop sound policies in this arena.

In addition, the clearinghouse could itself issue publications such as licensing guides for high-demand professions. These more targeted materials could be modeled on the career guides already developed by IMPRINT member organizations (see appendix for examples), and could include both state-specific licensing information and alternative career options for those workers who are unable to pursue full U.S. licensing. *As a bonus, such career guides are often found to be useful to American-born jobseekers as well.*

#### **A5. Fund research on skilled immigrants.**

***Desired outcome: Resulting data offer empirical evidence of impact/ results, encouraging public and private investments for scaling best practices***

Rigorous and well-defined research efforts could serve as a powerful tool for documenting the nature and extent of barriers faced by immigrant professionals, establishing baseline data about the population and assessing the potential economic impact of their successful re-establishment in professional careers.

Such efforts could build upon existing data collection and standardization efforts, as well as program-evaluation work such as the nonprofit Public/Private Ventures' national Benchmarking Project for workforce development programs. In addition, a federal emphasis on research could capitalize on the existing pool of data on refugee resettlement being collected by resettlement organizations.

## **B. Improving Access to Workforce Services**

Only a handful of organizations nationwide offer direct services tailored to the unique workforce integration challenges of skilled immigrants. Mainstream workforce development agencies, including both public and nonprofit entities, often have little in-house expertise in serving this specialized population and limited ability to independently develop such expertise.

Increasing access to appropriate adult education and workforce services is directly related to this Administration's goals of access, preparation, and completion of career pathways for adults, and of ensuring the supply of effective teachers and leaders for all adult learners.

#### **B1. Issue policy guidance affirming skilled immigrants' eligibility for existing services.**

***Desired outcome: Local- and state-level providers are empowered to provide services to all eligible workers in their communities, resulting in a measurable increase in skilled immigrants served and placed.***

Content for this memo should be tailored to the appropriate department or field, including one-stop centers and other WIA-funded education, training and employment services.

**B2. Use policy guidance, regulatory authority, and/or discretionary funding to create incentives for expanded services to this population.**

*Desired outcome: Incentive for innovation leads to new or scaled solutions in the field.*

These could include suggestions for pilot activities (intermediate and advanced vocational English classes; bridge programs; employer/service provider partnerships to train incumbent workers or widen the pipeline of new workers in STEM or other high-demand fields), spotlighting of model programs (e.g. I-BEST), or simply a points-based preference for projects serving immigrant professionals in relevant federal Solicitations for Grant Applications.

**B3. Provide training and technical assistance to federal grantees who currently or potentially could serve skilled immigrants.**

*Desired outcomes: Increased institutional and structural expertise and more systemic adoption of best practices leads to more skill-appropriate placements of skilled immigrants*

Activities could include professional development workshops, learning communities, and train-the-trainer courses, among others.

Mechanisms for delivery would include professional development activities, conferences and convenings of refugee resettlement programs, community college advising initiatives, and other front-line adult education and workforce development service providers.

**B4. Specifically invite workshops on immigrant professional issues via the Call for Proposals for existing federal conferences and convenings.**

*Desired outcome: Creates a forum for sharing of lessons from the field*

This would encourage existing service providers and subject-matter experts to share their expertise with colleagues at DOL/ETA conferences, ORR convenings, and similar events in other federal agencies.

**B5. Establish an on-demand training portal for immigrants to gain U.S. educational, career and cultural knowledge.**

*Desired outcome: Creates opportunities for distance, on-demand, and self-paced learning across the U.S.*

This site would focus on exercises and multimedia interactivity to build skills in the U.S. professional job search (e.g., resume writing, interview preparation, self-promotion). Similar online tools such as the Khan Academy have attracted significant build-out dollars by technology-friendly organizations such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Google.

**B6. Develop a campaign to identify, deter, and/or prosecute those that target immigrant professionals with fraudulent services.**

*Desired outcome: Protects vulnerable individuals from exploitation*

Such an initiative could mirror the USCIS initiative on the unauthorized practice of immigration law, titled "The Wrong Help Can Hurt." In this case, federal action to clarify what constitutes fraudulent or illegal activity, combined with vigorous prosecution of companies that engage in credential evaluation fraud and related malfeasance, would represent an important watchdog role.

## LOOKING FORWARD

In addition to the relatively short-term interventions described above, over the longer term, federal action on these policy issues could include new legislation with formula funding or set-asides (similar to those contained in the Perkins Act for correctional education, or related to extending Pell Grant eligibility to foreign-trained immigrants requiring additional training for workforce integration) as well as modifications to existing legislation (such as the Workforce Investment Act).

IMPRINT very much appreciates the opportunity to submit these suggestions and we invite further discussion of our recommendations with administration representatives. It is our hope that this can be the start of longer term coordinated efforts at the Federal as well as state levels.

## ABOUT IMPRINT

IMPRINT is a coalition of nonprofit organizations active in the emerging field of immigrant professional integration.

### **Mission:**

To identify and promote promising practices in the integration of immigrant professionals. IMPRINT supports national, state and local efforts to incorporate multilingual/multicultural talent, and to create and implement policies and promising practices that support the successful integration of skilled immigrants into the US economy. Through its member organizations, IMPRINT also supports the direct provision of career and re-credentialing services to workers.

### **Vision:**

IMPRINT envisions a United States which actively welcomes internationally educated skilled workers, and recognizes these talented individuals as vital colleagues, neighbors and fellow citizens.

### **Members:**

Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education [www.cccie.org](http://www.cccie.org)

Upwardly Global [www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org)

Welcome Back Initiative [www.welcomebackinitiative.org](http://www.welcomebackinitiative.org)

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians [www.welcomingcenter.org](http://www.welcomingcenter.org)

World Education Services [www.wes.org](http://www.wes.org)

### **Accomplishments and Qualifications:**

IMPRINT member expertise is broad:

*Training and Issue Education.* IMPRINT member organizations, individually and jointly hold trainings and information sessions for diverse audiences of practitioners, educators, employers and skilled immigrants regarding the issues of skilled immigrant workforce integration, interventions that work, and recommendations to achieve systemic change that can unleash a multiplier effect on numbers served.

*Direct services.* Upwardly Global, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, and the Welcome Back Initiative all deliver case management services and/or job search training directly to skilled immigrants, backed by the active engagement of educators, employers, and volunteers. Upwardly Global and Welcome Back Initiative models have been awarded the Migration Policy Institute's E Pluribus Unum award for outstanding immigrant integration work.

*Resource Development.* Career guides, informational websites, training toolkits, curricula: IMPRINT members all have experience identifying need and responding with resources in their areas of expertise

for skilled immigrants, for service providers, and for decision-makers. See the Appendix for details and links to some of these products.

*Program development, evaluation, and original research.* All IMPRINT members have developed proprietary programming in support of skilled immigrant integration, and adhere to carefully documented measures in tracking outcomes. Members have underwritten and conducted diverse research projects to quantify need as well as economic impact. These inform the practice of each member organization as well as policymakers, thought leaders, and employers. Taken as a whole, IMPRINT members offer a full spectrum of service to skilled immigrants as well as to those advancing this work.

*State government partnership.* Upwardly Global has partnered with the state of Illinois since 2009; its Influence & Impact program has specialized in improving information and services to immigrants trained in regulated professions and in healthcare and STEM sectors. Its Licensed Professions Guides receive over 1,500 visits a month and the state continues to support original research and programming including the Global Engineers in Residence program. Upwardly Global works with the governor's office as well as state human services, workforce, and regulatory agencies.

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians is funded by four Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Boards to provide employment services to immigrant jobseekers. The Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry and Department of Community and Economic Development have funded Welcoming Center career guides and activities for immigrant professionals. The Welcoming Center has also met with state officials to discuss barriers faced by immigrant professionals in applying for US professional licensure and worked with agency administrative staff to facilitate the accurate and timely review of individual applicants' requests.

*Sector work.* The Welcome Back Initiative opens career pathways for foreign-trained healthcare professionals through credentialing assistance and case management. WBI advocates not only for the healthcare professional but for the healthcare *consumer*, whose diversity is not currently reflected in the corps of U.S. providers, creating disparities in culturally appropriate care and health outcomes. Upwardly Global has established Global Engineers in Residence, or GEIR, to provide paid internship opportunities and supportive services to foreign-trained engineers.

*Credential evaluation and quality assurance.* World Education Services provides credential evaluation services to more than 40,000 internationally-trained individuals annually. These independent evaluations are a critical and objective tool for immigrants to use to demonstrate their academic qualifications for professional licensing, employment, and further education. WES also advocates for consistent professional standards and practices in the credential evaluation field, and offers guidance to help individuals distinguish reputable providers from those that offer fraudulent services.

*Immigrant entrepreneurship.* Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians supports Philadelphia-area immigrant entrepreneurs through training, research and advocacy to ensure their economic impact is maximized and their contributions to the region's economic and social vitality are recognized.

In sum, IMPRINT is uniquely and strategically positioned to implement promising practices, measure outcomes, and contribute to the advent and improvement of programming that transform the professional outlook for skilled immigrants while meeting U.S. employer needs.

## APPENDIX

Examples of existing resources for immigrant professionals, practitioners, and decision-makers:

**Careers for New Americans** website, developed by Upwardly Global. Licensing guides for New York, Illinois and California for high-demand regulated professions. Viewable at [www.careersfornewamericans.org](http://www.careersfornewamericans.org)

**Career Guides** for mechanical engineers, teachers, system analysts, and accountants and auditors, as well as a non-industry-specific “How to Succeed in the Workplace” guide for immigrant professionals. Developed by the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians. Viewable at <http://welcomingcenter.org/publications/publication-downloads>

World Education Services’ **Global Talent Bridge** initiative maintains an Immigrant Resources page at [www.globaltalentbridge.org/info](http://www.globaltalentbridge.org/info). WES’s *Supporting Skilled Immigrants Toolkit* is designed to assist service providers and can be found at [www.globaltalentbridge.org/toolkit](http://www.globaltalentbridge.org/toolkit).

The Welcome Back Initiative’s **English Health Train** is an innovative English-language curriculum for healthcare professionals. Sample viewable at <http://englishhealthtrain.welcomebackinitiative.org/>